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ABSTRACT

Joining Forces helps create a broad-based collaboration among the education, welfare, and child welfare systems to serve as a catalyst for change in public policy and practice on behalf of disadvantaged children and their families. An alarming number of children and adults face situations that threaten their immediate well-being and put them at-risk of long-term disadvantage. Traditionally, education has been viewed as the means to escape from poverty and disadvantage, but the dropout rate in many cities approaches or exceeds 50 percent and an estimated 23 million adults are functionally illiterate. These conditions persist in an era of significant, widespread reform in the welfare, child welfare, and education systems. However, no one system, regardless of how far-reaching its reform effort, has the expertise or resources to meet all of the complex and wide-ranging needs of those it serves. People are better able to learn when personal, family, and environmental problems are minimized or resolved. Better educated people will be better able to support themselves and avoid long-term dependency. By working together or in tandem, the education and social welfare systems stand to make better use of limited resources and to give each of the systems, and the people who rely on them, a greater chance at success. A list of 51 references is appended. (FMW)

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Joining Forces: Conceptual Underpinnings

Janet E. Levy

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Joining Forces: Conceptual Underpinnings

I. Executive Summary

An alarming number of children and adults today face situations which threaten their immediate well-being and put them "at risk" of long-term disadvantage. Poverty, adolescent parenting, and a range of other factors challenge their opportunity to lead healthy, productive lives.

Traditionally, education has been viewed as the means of escape from poverty and disadvantage. Yet today, this means of escape is often illusive. One out of every four children entering ninth grade will not graduate from high school. The dropout rate is considerably higher among minorities and the poor, and in many cities, it approaches or exceeds 50%. It is estimated that 23 million adults are functionally illiterate.

This represents a crisis, not only for the affected individuals, but for our general economic and societal well-being. Changes in technology and global competition have greatly reduced the number of unskilled jobs, and the workforce of the future must have not only basic, but more advanced skills as well.

These conditions exist in an era of significant, widespread "reform" in many of our major people-serving systems. The welfare system is placing new emphasis on helping recipients to become self-supporting. Strengthening families and communities so that they give children a healthy, nurturing start is the focus of child welfare reform. Education is stressing ways to improve students' basic and higher-order thinking skills so that they are better prepared for the jobs of the future.

This reform activity might suggest a reason for optimism about the future, an assumption that change is underway which portends more effective responses to disadvantage. Yet, if these reform efforts proceed only within the confines of individual systems, they will fail in the long run to help

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This reform activity might suggest a reason for optimism about the future, an assumption that change is underway which portends more effective responses to disadvantage. Yet, if these reform efforts proceed only within the confines of individual systems, they will fail in the long run to help

positioned to deal with problems not yet known. To be a core aspect of these massive systems, collaboration must reach deep into the fabric of structures, mechanisms, and processes by which the organizations live.

The role of **Joining Forces** is to help bring into being this broad-based collaboration among the education, welfare, and child welfare systems, to serve as a catalyst for tangible change in policy and practice. The initiative has already provided the spark to get discussion and action started, and will continue to serve as a visible symbol and focus for the idea of collaboration. By bringing specific skills and expertise to the difficult process of implementation which lies ahead, **Joining Forces** will help states and localities identify and overcome barriers. And as incremental successes are realized, **Joining Forces** will encourage and support movement to the next, deeper level of structural change.

It is clear that no one system, regardless of how far-reaching its reform effort, has the expertise or resources to meet all of the complex and wide-ranging needs of children and families today. **Joining Forces** reflects the belief, shared by top officials in all our people-serving sectors, that a challenge of the scale and scope presently facing this country can only be met through their <u>combined</u> efforts.

To the extent that personal, family, and environmental problems are minimized or resolved, people are better able to learn; to the extent that people learn, they will be better able to support themselves and avoid long-term dependency. By working together or in tandem, the education and social welfare systems stand to make better use of limited resources and to give each of the systems, and the people who rely on them, a greater chance at success.

II. Statement of the Problem

A. Families and Children At Risk[1]

Poverty is a fundamental and far-reaching source of risk. One child in four, over 13 million total, are born into poverty. Over 6 million children live in households with incomes less than half the poverty level. Welfare programs do not eliminate this problem. Public assistance payment levels in the majority of states are far below the poverty level.

Even work does not assure a family income security. An individual working full-time at the minimum wage does not earn enough to keep a family of three out of poverty. Working single mothers earn an average of $10,076 per year.

This meager income does not go far. Over 6 million households paid more than half their income for rent and utilities in 1983; in 15 states in 1985, the low fair market rent exceeded the total welfare grant for a family of four. The Physician Task Force on Hunger in America estimates that millions
of Americans go hungry each month. Full-time child care, a critical need if parents are to work, costs about $3,000 per year for one child.

Family composition is closely related to income status and other at-risk factors. In 1983, there were about 500,000 births to teens. Babies of teen mothers are likely to be of low birth-weight and to suffer from birth defects, developmental delays, and learning difficulties; the young mothers and fathers are ill-equipped to be providers or parents. Over half the mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (welfare) had their first child as a teen.

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[1]Much of the data in this section is taken from the Children's Defense Fund's A Call for Action to Make Our Nation Safe for Children: A Briefing Book on the Status of American Children in 1988.

Fifty-nine percent of children born in 1983 will at some point live with only one parent, usually the mother. Female-headed households are especially vulnerable to poverty and stress. Congressional reports indicate that the 1983 poverty rate for children in female-headed households was 55.4%, more than four times that for children in a household with a male present.

Minority children are at particular risk. Forty-three percent of black children and 40% of Hispanic children lived in poverty in 1985. This concentration of disadvantage has dire implications not only for the affected individuals but, given demographic trends, for our society as a whole. Harold Hodgkinson of the Institute for Educational Leadership reports that one of every three Americans will be non-white by the year 2000, and that within a few years of that time, up to ten states may have a "majority of minorities".

Adding to the risks for many of our families and children are widespread substance abuse, inadequate health care, and a lack of affordable housing that leads to overcrowding and, at the extreme, homelessness. The Children's Defense Fund reports that families with children now represent more than one-third of the homeless population nationwide.

An indicator of the stress many families now face is the dramatic rise in child abuse and neglect; there were over two million reported cases in 1986. Annually, more than a million children run away from home each year, frequently to escape abuse or other family problems. Thousands of young people attempt suicide each year.

Often, these factors occur in the same families, dramatically increasing the degree of risk and the complexity of solutions.

B. <u>The Interrelatedness of Risk Factors and School Success</u>

Traditionally, education has been viewed as the means of escape from poverty and disadvantage. Yet today, this means of escape is often illusive. One out of every four children entering ninth grade will not

graduate from high school. The dropout rate is considerably higher among minorities and the poor, and in many cities, it approaches or even exceeds 50%. It is estimated that 23 million adults are functionally illiterate.

While poverty and other factors cited above cannot always be equated with school failure -- many of those at-risk do succeed -- research increasingly points to a demonstrable and fundamentally troubling correlation between the risk factors facing adults and children today and educational achievement. Wehlage and Rutter cite four national longitudinal studies that "confirm that a family background characterized by low socioeconomic status is strongly associated with dropping out."

Earle identifies an association between teen parenting and dropping out of school. Forty percent of girls who drop out do so for reasons related to pregnancy. The Committee on Economic Development cites data showing that teen fathers are less likely to graduate than their peers who are not parents.

A longitudinal study by The National Association of Elementary School Principals and the Kettering Foundation found that "one-parent children, on the whole, show lower achievement in school than their two-parent peers. . . their absence rate runs far higher . . . are consistently more likely to be late, truant, and subject to disciplinary action . . . one-parent children are more than twice as likely as two-parent children to give up on school altogether."

Paralleling the disproportionate number of minority families at risk are racial disparities in educational achievement. Although Wehlage and Rutter report that race is not a predictor of dropping out when family background is controlled, educational disadvantage is high among minorities. Gordon Berlin and Andrew Sum cite National Assessment of Educational Progress data showing a narrowing but still substantial gap between test scores of black and white students. According to data summarized by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students, "blacks are suspended three times as often as whites . . . the national drop-out rate for blacks in high school is nearly twice that of whites . . . [and] black students are more

than three times as likely to be in a class for educable mentally retarded as white students but only half as likely to be in a class for the gifted and talented."

Despite desegregation, a majority of black students attend predominantly minority schools. Many of these schools are in poor communities, and the U.S. Department of Education reports that students in schools with a concentration of low-income students tend to do less well on achievement tests, whether or not they themselves are poor.

Regardless of race, youths from disadvantaged families are three times more likely to drop out of school than their counterparts from more advantaged families, according to National Center for Education Statistics cited by Andrew Hahn and Jacqueline Danzberger. Looking specifically at what happens to youngsters in welfare families, Robert Lerman of Brandeis University found that 19% of dropouts aged 14-21 were from families which received AFDC in the year prior to the student's dropping out, as contrasted to 6% of graduates in that age group. Especially in urban areas, schools may have a very high proportion of students from welfare families. For example, **Joining Forces** estimates that at least one-third of the students in Baltimore City public schools live in families receiving AFDC.

Linguistic and cultural differences put many of the over two million children in immigrant families at risk from an educational perspective. A recent report by the National Coalition of Advocates for Students stated, "Immigrant students are more likely to be retained in-grade, inappropriately placed in special education, and are at double risk for being placed in low academic tracks on the basis of language limitations or slow academic progress. The cumulative effects of these experiences often cause immigrant students to leave school early, and create great emotional stress." Six percent of the nation's total public school enrollment, immigrant children constitute a much higher proportion in a number of major cities. Complicating the challenge of educating many of these children is the fact that, as Henry Levin notes, they often come from extremely poor, rural areas where formal education was lacking or of a very low quality.

Often compounding the negative effects of factors external to the school are school practices and policies. Students whose self-esteem and hopes for the future are already in jeopardy frequently confront a system which is impersonal, holds low expectations for them, and in which they are constantly frustrated by a lack of success. Beyond socioeconomic factors which put students at risk, low academic achievement is a significant predictor of dropping out.

Levin estimates that almost one-third of the nation's schoolchildren are educationally disadvantaged, which he defines as "students who lack the home and community resources to fully benefit from conventional schooling practices and the recent wave of educational reform." The proportion of disadvantaged students is expected to grow in the future.

Children who are ill-prepared when they begin school, who are hungry or in poor health, who are abused or neglected, whose haphazard and often chaotic home life provides little nurturance or support for achievement, who do not speak English at home, who miss school to care for a younger sibling or to help provide income for the family, can be expected to have trouble learning. Too often, the sense of failure that comes with poor academic achievement is reinforced by administrative practices and policies of school systems that chiefly punish or exclude. The result is that these children may well leave school without even the basic skills needed to get and keep a job. And without a successful school experience, the child from an at-risk family is likely to become an economically disadvantaged, at-risk adult, and in turn, the parent of children at-risk.

C. <u>The Relationship of Educational Achievement and Economic Success</u>

The Committee on Economic Development observes, "Children of the poor have always been less likely to complete their education . . . Until the 1950's, fewer than 50 percent of students graduated from high school. A strong back and a pair of deft hands could secure a decently paid factory job or help run a farm. [But t]he technological revolution and intensified global competition have brought dramatic and irreversible changes to the job

market." Berlin and Sum summarize these changes -- an increase in professional, technical and administrative jobs which are stable and pay reasonably well; an increase in low-wage, often part-time service jobs; and a decrease in manufacturing and craft jobs that offered good wages even to those with limited education or training.

The children now in school, those to come, and the estimated 23 million adults who are functionally illiterate simply cannot compete in today's and tomorrow's economy without a firm educational grounding.

But they are not getting that necessary grounding. Berlin and Sum describe a "basic skills crisis" and its relation to disadvantage. They report that "between 40 and 59% of all those who are unemployed, dropouts, welfare dependents, or unwed parents have [standardized test] scores that place them in the lowest fifth of the test [score distribution]." The Children's Defense Fund reports that "teens with poor basic skills are five times as likely to become mothers before age 16 as are those with average skills," and that "youths who by age 18 have the weakest basic academic skills are five times more likely to drop out of school and be jobless in subsequent years than those with above-average basic skills."

CDF further reports that "dropouts are two and a half times more likely to be unemployed than high school graduates," and that "three-fifths of all adults on AFDC have not graduated from high school."

According to Berlin and Sum, the mean earnings of the average high school dropout age 20-24 are $6,552, and 43% of black dropouts in that age group reported no earnings. Among those who work, educational attainment has an increasingly significant effect on income; there is a 59% difference between the mean annual income of a high school dropout and a graduate, and the gap is growing.

Dropping out is costly to society as well as individuals. The Children's Defense Fund reports that "a recent estimate of the total lifetime earning loss of the dropouts in the high school class of 1981 is $228 billion, with an approximate tax revenue loss of $68.4 billion."

Related social costs magnify that figure; Berlin and Sum observe that men without adequate earnings are less likely to marry, despite the fact that they are fathering children, and are more likely to be arrested.

D. The Inadequacy of Current Responses

The sum of our institutional responses to the crisis of these conditions, simply stated, is too often ineffective -- characterized by inappropriate approaches, fragmentation, delays, and gaps in service.

Some argue that the problem is too few resources. It is true that expenditures are woefully inadequate to the need and to the potential of some cost-effective interventions, and that many systems as currently constructed are seriously overburdened. Yet, it is also true that we are spending a great deal and that a wide array of programs and services is available.

Others look at the continuation of problems in the face of large expenditures and decide that "nothing works." In her recent book, Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage, Lisbeth Schorr counters that pessimistic view, citing numerous examples of highly successful social interventions and the common traits which seem to account for success. These interventions generally are intensive, responsive to needs as they are defined by the recipient rather than the provider of service, flexible, comprehensive, and readily accessible. For the most part, by contrast, the majority of public expenditures for both education and human services are presently devoted to approaches and expended through delivery systems which run directly counter to the principles which make Schorr's models successful.

We do not respond to early warning signs, but react only when there is failure or crisis, when it is much more difficult and much more expensive to achieve success. When we do intervene, our objectives are often narrow and modest; most of what we do is intended only to relieve the most extreme manifestations of the crisis. There are few procedures or people to serve as bridges, to identify those in need and assure that they are aware of and

have access to the array of available resources. Program definitions, eligibility rules and financing patterns limit agency actions and perspectives to a narrow focus. Systems essentially function in isolation from one another, and virtually none see the individual or the family unit as a whole, with all the interrelated problems and strengths.

Our current systemic responses frequently serve only to frustrate those who need help and those within the system who want to help.

III. An Era of Reform

While this is a time of severe need and systemic inadequacy to respond to that need, it is also a time of unusual potential. Each of our major people-serving systems has embarked on a period of significant change, and the confluence of these reform efforts presents us with a rare opportunity.

A. Welfare Reform: Promoting Self-Sufficiency

The primary means for providing income assistance to poor children and their families is the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program. Established in 1935 as part of the Social Security Act, this program is governed by federal laws and regulations. States have some, but relatively few, program design options, and are the chief administrative authority. Many states operate the AFDC program directly. Even where the program is county-operated, stringent federal and state guidelines on virtually every facet except benefit levels result in intrastate uniformity. Financing is primarily federal and state, with limited local contributions in some areas.

For most families, dependence is relatively short-term; the average time on welfare is just over two years. However, the move from welfare is often to a relatively low-wage job, with few benefits and little job security, leaving the family vulnerable to a myriad of circumstances which could force a return to the welfare rolls. And there are a substantial number of households which already are relying on public assistance for a period considerably longer than the average. Research shows that if a

family does not leave the rolls within two years, it is likely to remain for an average of eight. With large numbers of teen births, students dropping out of school, and similar predictors of extended dependency, there is a danger that the popular misconception of long-term, multi-generational dependency may become a reality for some households.

Facing this threat, and a general dissatisfaction with the current welfare system, many states and, more recently, Congress are undertaking significant efforts at reform. Stephen Heintz, Connecticut Commissioner of Income Maintenance and chairman of the American Public Welfare Association's (APWA) welfare reform project, cites two basic philosophical tenets underlying the initiatives: 1) that there is a set of mutual obligations and expectations between the society and its citizenry which should be the foundation of the welfare system; and 2) that the mission of the public assistance system should not simply be to issue checks, but rather to help recipients move toward self-sufficiency.

Comprehensive welfare-to-work programs are a central feature of virtually all reform proposals. These may impose certain requirements for public sector work in exchange for benefits, but more generally emphasize a range of activities to help people prepare for and locate jobs. Most plans incorporate provisions for adult education and training, either as an option for recipients or as a requirement in lieu of employment, if the recipient's skills are insufficient for job placement. Many reform initiatives are using some form of client-agency agreement to outline mutual responsibilities for the recipient's movement toward self-support, and most offer an array of support services, like day care, which are deemed necessary to participation in the workforce.

Another feature included in many reform proposals is that of a "case management system." The concept of case management is gaining increasing popularity, and welfare is only one of the sectors that is incorporating some version of the idea. In this instance, as characterized by the American Public Welfare Association, the case manager will "help families assess their needs and resources and . . . implement and monitor the agency-client contract."

Poverty among children is a primary motivating factor in welfare reform, and the goals of reform are stated in terms like "family self-sufficiency" and "preventing long-term dependency," which imply a cross-generational concern. Yet, the focus of current designs is almost wholly on employment of the household head. There is as yet little if any consideration of the effects of reform per se on the children in the households, or of the direct needs of the children themselves, although they may be in trouble at school or experiencing other difficulties which could put them in imminent danger of continuing welfare dependency. Many of the leaders in the welfare reform movement look to inclusion of more child-directed actions in subsequent phases of reform.

B. Change in the Child Welfare System: Strengthening Families[2]

The nation's child welfare system, like the income maintenance system, is administered by the states within parameters established by federal law and regulation. Some states operate child welfare programs directly; other states supervise county-operated programs, again within stringent guidelines that are designed to assure intrastate uniformity. Financing is primarily federal and state, with limited local contributions in some areas. The traditional components of the child welfare system include protective services for abused and neglected children, foster care, and adoption services.

As the child welfare system evolved in the twentieth century, it placed heavy emphasis on out-of-home care for children. By the 1970's, over a half million children were living in foster homes or child care institutions; many remained in care for years, and natural families received little help to deal with the crises that originally led to placement. Beginning with the adoption of P.L. 96-272 in 1980, concerted efforts have significantly reduced the number of children in out-of-home placements. Many children returned to their own families; for those who could not, efforts have been

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[2]This section draws heavily on the work of The Center for The Study of Social Policy, and in particular, on its paper, A Framework for Child Welfare Reform.

directed to adoption or placement in non-institutional, community-based settings.

Nonetheless, over 275,000 children remain in foster homes, group homes, or child care institutions, and according to the Center for the Study of Social Policy, out-of-home placements are again accelerating, often exceeding available resources. Many of these children are deeply troubled, or are older children who have "grown up" in the child welfare system. Assuring them some measure of stability, helping them deal with serious problems, and providing them with the skills they will need as adults are tasks which pose considerable challenge to both child welfare and to the schools these children attend.

One factor contributing to rising placements is the tremendous growth in reports of child abuse and neglect. Some of this may be attributable to new reporting requirements for a broad range of professionals involved with children, including school personnel, and to widespread publicity that has sensitized the public to child abuse. Most experts believe, however, that increased stress on families is also leading to a real increase in abuse and neglect.

The Center summarizes the current situation, ". . . today's child welfare system can respond to children and families only in very limited ways . . . the system is overwhelmed and has difficulty carrying out such basic responsibilities as timely investigation of abuse reports or appropriate placement of foster children. Caught too frequently in a crisis mode itself, public child welfare services can rarely address conditions that precipitate family crisis."

While change in the child welfare system is not yet so sweeping, formalized, or publicly visible as the welfare reform and education reform movements, it is receiving increasing attention. There have been staff increases for protective services, development of additional and new types of out-of-home placements, and an increase in interagency planning to coordinate services better for children in placement.

New programs are also being added to the child welfare system to reduce the need for placement. In the words of the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, a leader in promoting change in the values and practices of the child welfare system, "Preventing bad foster care means reforming the system to institute good practices. Preventing unnecessary foster care means providing alternative means to cope with the problems foster care was supposed to help cure in the first place -- abuse, neglect, status offenses, and delinquency -- wherever feasible." So-called "family preservation services," exemplified by Seattle's Homebuilders, provide intensive, in-home services to a family in trouble, allowing the child to remain in his own home and enabling the family to overcome crisis which in the past would have necessitated placement.

Closely related, but even broader in scope, is a fledgling reform effort being undertaken by a few states, with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and under the direction of the Center for the Study of Social Policy. The emphasis of this effort is "on finding more practical and proactive ways for states and communities to enable parents to care for their children, thereby ensuring that fewer children and families arrive at the point where traditional child welfare interventions are necessary. The underpinnings of this redefined system are involved communities with well-coordinated service resources directed to the goal of assuring the healthy development of children through the strengthening of their families."

At the heart of the projected system would be a new form of case management, with generic responsibility spanning categorical areas. Case management under this proposal would seek to establish an empowering, "problem-solving relationship with the family around a wide range of needs and using diverse resources." Where capacity is limited, priority may be given to very high risk families, but this type of relationship could also be useful in less severe circumstances, perhaps to prevent the development of crisis. The "core family service system," built around case management and significantly expanded family preservation/family support services, would be responsible for assessment, planning, resource mobilization, and

monitoring, functions that would no longer need to be done repetitively by the more specialized direct services.

The Casey child welfare reform initiative also encourages the development of a more complete array of therapeutic and preventive services, and "anchoring families and children's services within local communities." The latter objective would include tapping the efforts of a community's residents and informal support structures, and decentralizing at least parts of the system to encourage and enhance local input and control.

C. Education Reform: Improving Basic and Higher Order Thinking Skills[3]

Unlike in the welfare and child welfare systems, local communities retain considerable autonomy in the area of education and contribute a substantial amount -- though in most areas, no longer the majority -- of funding. The involvement of the federal government is generally limited to specialized programs for selected target populations, e.g., handicapped youngsters and disadvantaged students, and to the assurance of non-discrimination.

States set governing policies for local systems in areas like teacher certification and graduation requirements, and provide significant funding for basic education, as well as special programming. According to Michael Cohen of the National Governors' Association, "states invest approximately 37% of their annual budgets in education and fund slightly more than 50% of the costs of elementary and secondary education." It should be noted that that figure represents an average across an entire state. Wealthier jurisdictions are likely to spend substantially more per pupil than are poor communities, an aspect that is important in considering state responsibility with respect to disadvantaged citizens. Substantial intrastate disparities in expenditures are much less likely in social welfare programs.

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[3]This section draws heavily on a paper by Michael Cohen of the National Governors' Association entitled "Restructuring the Education System: Agenda for the Nineties."

There are two other comparisons between education and the social welfare systems that are worth citing because of potential relevance to the acceptance of a shared mission and the building of collaborative relationships. One is the fact that, in contrast to the social welfare system's focused responsibility for disadvantaged individuals and families, education's perspective is universal. While the disadvantaged population is within the total realm of the education system's responsibility, at least up until now it has been a relatively small proportion and therefore less able to command attention in a environment of competing demands. The other intersystem distinction is the role of lay citizens. Through state and local boards of education, lay citizens act as policymakers, whereas in human services they serve, if at all, only in advisory capacity.

Growing concern about the effectiveness of American education led in the early 1980's to education reform movements in a number of states and to creation of the National Commission on Excellence in Education in 1981. The issuance of the Commission's report, A Nation At Risk, in 1983, brought concentrated public and political attention to education, and precipitated widespread and wide-ranging reforms intended to upgrade the quality of schools and improve the achievement level of the students.

Initially, reforms focused on raising standards and monitoring student performance. This included curriculum changes, particularly strengthening of math and sciences, and increasing course requirements and achievement levels for graduation, primarily at the high school level. Expanded use of competency testing, an increase in homework, and lengthening of the school day and school year often accompanied these changes.

Reform then turned to teacher effectiveness. Requirements and procedures for certification were tightened, salaries were increased, often in conjuction with new systems for performance evaluation, and career ladders were designed to help retain qualified, experienced teachers.

Now, according to Cohen, the "demand on schools is shifting from simply increasing the number of graduates with basic skills to increasing both the proportion of students who graduate and the kinds of knowledge and skills

students graduate with." Among the elements that he foresees in the "restructuring" movement are new emphasis on higher-order thinking skills, the introduction of instructional methods and activities that are more challenging for students, use of outcomes-based and mastery learning approaches that set performance expectations but allow students to progress at their own pace, and experimentation with non-traditional class sizes and composition.

Cohen also anticipates expanded use of team-teaching and other approaches which foster greater professional collegiality, as well as vesting teachers with more decisionmaking responsibility. With respect to these changes he observes, "It will be critical to find time for teachers to assume these new roles and responsibilities. However, this will not be easy within the current school structure. At present . . . there are rarely significant blocks of time during which teachers can interact with one another or with small numbers of students."

The management and governance structure of the education system, in the view of many, must also change along with changes in school features, most significantly by decentralizing the locus of much decisionmaking to the school level. Principals and teachers would have greater authority, and the surrounding community -- not just parents of children in the school, but the community as a whole -- would be encouraged more directly to help frame the mission and focus of the school. Decentralized decisionmaking would be complemented by outcome-oriented accountability systems that allow flexibility while assuring the achievement of objectives.

D. Education Reform and Disadvantaged Students: Seeking Success for All

Beyond the general education reform movement, attention is now turning to the at-risk or disadvantaged student, as evidenced in recent reports by the Committee for Economic Development, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and the Council of Chief State School Officers. In calling for "reform that gives the highest priority to early and sustained intervention in the lives of disadvantaged children," CED recognized that reform to date has substantially failed to address the needs and success of

children at-risk. Others concur, and go on to argue that, without supplemental attention, many of the education reforms already adopted could in fact harm rather than help disadvantaged students.

The 1960's introduced into public policy the philosophically revolutionary idea that all students should succeed and that responsibility for success rested not just with the student, but also with the education system. Toward that end, compensatory programs specifically designed to aid the educational performance of disadvantaged students were created -- Head Start, the Migrant Education Program, Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and later Chapter I of the Education Consolidation and Improvement Act of 1981. These programs have proven effective, some significantly so. But their scope has been limited, and serious underfinancing means that Chapter I reaches only about half the eligible students, and Head Start fewer than 20%.

Henry Levin summarizes the situation, "Over the last two decades, some progress has been made in improving the education of the disadvantaged . . . Nevertheless, we have reached a plateau in which most of the gap [between minority and non-minority students, and low SES status and other students] remains, and whatever progress has been made has not been adequate to bring disadvantaged students into the mainstream of educational life in America."

It is generally acknowledged that the broad education reform efforts described above offer little to correct this. These efforts are motivated by concern about the nation's overall economic future and competitiveness, and are targeted to the educational system as a whole and the needs of the "average" student. While disadvantaged students may benefit somewhat from a general improvement in quality and some of the components of the broad restructuring movement, without focused attention, those who were already having difficulty will likely find higher achievement standards to be an added barrier. Thus far, little in the way of focussed attention has been undertaken, and schools are generally failing to respond effectively to the needs of disadvantaged students.

Recent calls for greater attention to the needs of disadvantaged students at the preschool, elementary, and secondary levels consider both the characteristics of the youngsters and institutional characteristics which impede achievement by these youngsters. There are proposals to increase the number of minority teachers, use instructional approaches that reduce students' sense of alienation and isolation, and improve the physical condition and safety of the school building. In addition, educators like Levin, James Comer, and Robert Slavin, as well as organizations like the Committee for Economic Development, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, the National Governors' Association, and the National Foundation for the Improvement of Education, emphasize themes such as:

-- Early intervention, including infant health, parenting assistance, and family support programs, and high quality child care, preschool, and early childhood education programs;

-- Sustained intervention, so that the benefits of a "good start" are not lost if the child experiences difficulty in subsequent years;

-- Relating school to work and the realities of students' lives, and providing work opportunities for older students;

-- Making parents partners in the educational process, both by helping them to create a home environment that supports learning and by increasing and enhancing the quality of their interaction with the school;

-- Providing or assuring access to support services for students, such as day care for adolescent parents, health services, and crisis counseling; and

-- Engaging the community as a whole -- including business, private and public service agencies, and institutions like churches -- in supporting education.

There is also a movement, presently small but possibly significant, to increase state intervention and control when local jurisdictions are deemed unable to carry out their responsibilities, including the education of disadvantaged students. Five states have adopted authority for state takeover of local school districts for academic, political, or financial reasons, and the reauthorization of federal Chapter I legislation also contains a provision for state action when local administration of the program is deemed ineffective. New Jersey's recent takeover of the Jersey City school district is the first instance where "bankruptcy legislation" has been used for a full-scale takeover, and the outcome is yet to be determined. But this new role for states potentially brings an important additional source of focused attention to the needs and success of at-risk youngsters.

Although discussion of education and the disadvantaged tends to center on dropout prevention for children and youth who are in school, there is growing recognition of the need to address the school-to-work transition for students who will end their formal education with high school graduation, as well as to reach out-of-school populations. These populations include older adolescents who have already left school, functionally illiterate adults, adults who require remedial education to make the transition from welfare dependence to employment, and adults previously employed in unskilled jobs who will need training or retraining to compete in today's job market.

The William T. Grant Foundation, studying the situation of what they call non-college youth in America, cite a number of approaches that are beneficial in bridging the gap from school to work. These include monitored work experience like apprenticeships and youth-run businesses, community service and volunteer activity like peer tutoring, career counseling, and mentoring programs that link adults and youth. Both residential and non-residential pre-employment programs which address basic skill competencies, motivation, and job readiness preparation have had success with out-of-school youth.

The Job Training Partnership Act has also been a vehicle for some remedial activity with both youth and adults, although until recently, this

program's impact on the severely disadvantaged has been very limited. To some extent this is characteristic of the entire continuing education system, as well. According to the Grant Foundation, "currently, both public and private resources for adult education are channelled overwhelmingly to persons who have or are seeking a college degree."

In general, there is still a great deal to be learned about the dimensions of educational need among out-of-school populations, including welfare recipients whom we are trying to help achieve self-sufficiency, and about the best ways of reaching and serving these populations. James Hyman of the Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation summarizes these concerns, "We neither know where to target education services, e.g., who will benefit most and least; what educational services are required; what progress we should expect participants to make; nor how long and at what cost these services need to be provided."

E. Cross-Sector Implications and Opportunities

Joining Forces believes that the convergence of change in all of these people-serving systems presents a moment of unique opportunity in which to pursue a collaborative agenda. There is far more than the usual possibility to shape future directions that differ from present configurations.

From a general perspective, an environment of change means that usual institutional rigidity is at least moderated, and with appropriate guidance, organizations are more malleable. Of course, the uncertainty and instability that accompanies change also creates tension, and change in itself absorbs a great deal of people's attention and energy. But the mere fact that attention is focused somewhere other than on the demands of daily routine means there is potentially openness to new ideas.

A second reason that we view this as a propitious time for advancing collaboration is that there is a growing, if not always recognized, interdependence among systems. Inevitably, given the overlap of problems and target populations, reform will have both predictable and unanticipated

effects across sectors; these implications need to be addressed jointly and systematically to optimize chances of success and minimize negative repercussions on people. Moreover, the goals that each system is setting for its own reform effort cannot be realized alone, but depend on complementary action by one or more other sectors.

Welfare reform offers a good case in point. Preventing multi-generational dependency, a fundamental goal of reform, means that children must receive a good education. Reform is destined to fail if, at the same time the welfare system is helping parents on the road to self-sufficiency, their children are dropping out of school and coming onto the rolls.

Systems undergoing change will affect each other quite tangibly and immediately, as well. Concerted efforts to prepare adult welfare recipients for jobs will greatly increase the demand on the Adult Basic Education system (ABE); without careful planning, such demand may well exceed the capacity of this relatively small program. GAIN, California's welfare reform initiative, projected that 40% of recipients would need ABE services; they found that 60% were in need of remedial education before job placement. Moreover, as Hyman observes, welfare system adult education requirements introduce a mandatory aspect into a system that heretofore has been purely voluntary. Another example of potential repercussions is Wisconsin's Learnfare program. The policy requiring adolescents in AFDC households to stay in or return to school was adopted by the welfare department with almost no involvement of the education community; suddenly, educators had to deal with a substantial number of students perceived as "difficult," who were returning to or remaining in school rather than dropping out.

From the perspective of meeting their own objectives, as well, schools will have a heightened interest in what other systems are doing or could do. With the proportion of disadvantaged students growing and increasing pressure to assure that these children succeed, schools more and more recognize the urgency of addressing the range of factors that impede a child's performance in school. Barbara Blum, President of the Foundation for Child Development, observes, ". . . in many schools and for many children, it is impossible to do a good job of revamping the classroom

without shoring up the very foundation on which it rests -- and classrooms will be structurally sound only when we succeed in strengthening the social and family supports of the children who sit in them."

Given cross-system impacts and mutual dependence on one another to achieve goals, self-interest -- once it is understood by the systems -- can provide a strong impetus to carefully planned and managed interaction.

Third, the potential motivation of self-interest is complemented by many commonalities among the reform efforts in concerns, emphases, and operational approaches, commonalities which further suggest that this is indeed a moment of unusual opportunity. Increasingly, all the systems under consideration are attempting to refocus on desired outcomes, rather than simply to specify required inputs. In line with this, staff responsibilities are being redefined, and there is a readiness to consider flexibility in local design and delivery, so long as adequate accountability for achievement of outcomes is maintained. There is strong interest in more effectively mobilizing and coordinating a broad range of services to achieve desired ends, as suggested by the frequent use of terms like "case management" across all sectors. And consensus is emerging on a set of basic principles which can form the framework for development of a new, shared vision of the conditions and supports we want to create for children and their families.

IV. Looking Beyond Our Current Systems: Principles to Guide a New Vision

The pervasiveness and nature of reform throughout the people-serving sectors are testimony to broad recognition of the inefficacy of our current approaches and of the need to look beyond our current systems.

What previously have been seen as personal "failures" on the part of individuals -- dropping out of school or welfare dependency, for instance -- are now being viewed as responses to a much wider range of environmental and institutional breakdowns. While no individual can be absolved of responsibility to participate as a productive member of society to the fullest of his or her capability, neither can he or she be expected to

succeed in the absence of the most basic supports, supports which today are often inaccessible or missing.

To assure the availability of those supports, our people-serving institutions must frame together an holistic view of what children, adults, and families need to succeed, and then determine what they respectively can contribute to that overall, common vision. While shaping the vision will take time and the ideas and work of many, there are already, as noted above, some underlying principles on which consensus is emerging. These principles will provide a framework for development of the shared vision, can help guide individual systems as they pursue their respective reform efforts, and strongly suggest the need for collaboration among systems. As such, they also form the context within which Joining Forces will work. Among these principles[4]:

-- Basic needs for food, clothing, shelter, and health care must be met, especially for children, whose future is heavily determined by the foundations which are laid early. Public assistance grants that provide little more than subsistence, the dearth of affordable housing, the lack of jobs that are accessible to disadvantaged communities create an almost surreal circumstance, in which energy and attention is continuously focused on the demands of daily survival. Achieving higher objectives is extremely difficult when these basic needs go unmet.

-- There are mutual obligations between society and its citizens, and those served by these systems should be viewed as active participants, with both responsibilities and strengths on which the systems should build. "Empowerment" is a term which lost fashion after the 1960's, but is now reemerging as a broad philosophical commitment that systems need to make to those they serve and the communities in which they live.

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[4]This section relies heavily on Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage by Lisbeth B. Schorr; A Framework for Child Welfare Reform by the Center for the Study of Social Policy; and Ladders Out of Poverty: A Report on the Project on the Welfare of Famlies, edited by Jack A. Meyer.

-- People should have the opportunity to be contributing, productive members of society and should receive the preparation, at whatever point or points in their lives it is needed, to take advantage of that opportunity. Especially with today's rapidly changing economy and technology, learning will be a lifelong process. Not only do children need a firm educational grounding in the years traditionally allocated to schooling, but additional education, training, and retraining will likely be needed at various points in an adult's life. For individuals and communities presently outside the economic mainstream, targeted efforts to aid economic development and the achievement of self-sufficiency are indicated.

-- The family, although changing in nature and capacity, remains vitally important, and should be strengthened and complemented, not further displaced, by other societal institutions. Strengthening families should be part of the commitment to empowerment. The stress under which many families live and the more universal changes brought about by economic trends have significantly altered the role of the family, and have necessarily led to supplementary caregiving and nurturing activities by other institutions. But James Coleman points out the difference between the inputs a child receives from formal institutions -- opportunities, demands and rewards -- and the "social capital," or attitudes and conception of self, which he or she receives from home and community. Leaving the socialization process to traditionally structured schools simply increases one type of input without satisfying the other. Coleman argues that schools must "change as families change, must be adjusted to the institution they complement." Those changes, and any other interventions we undertake, wherever possible, need to support, reinforce and engage the family, not ignore or try to replace it. In line with acknowledging the role of the family unit, interventions should take an intergenerational, whole-family perspective, avoiding the fragmentation, missed opportunities and ineffectiveness that come with targeting individual family members separately. While programs are developed for the teen mother and her child, let us not forget the contribution that the grandparent, with some support and direction, may be able to make, nor the heightened risk of early parenting that the teen's younger sibling faces.

-- Not only must the individual be seen in the context of the family, but also the family in the context of the community, and specific problems as part of a whole. By extension, institutions must see their mission as part of a broader, overall mission. As William Julius Wilson suggests in his thesis of the reverberations of economic decline in and exodus of employed individuals from the inner city, many of the problems these systems are seeking to counter reflect whole communities in crisis. To respond in kind, interventions must be multidisciplinary, and must both serve and engage broad segments of the community. There is widespread awareness that the problems are extremely complex; now there must be equivalent acknowledgement that complex problems require complex solutions.

-- The overall capacity to respond to human needs and problems must be reshaped so that it reflects this holistic view, as well as the knowledge that is available about what constitutes good practice. We must respond to problems as the individual, family, and community perceive them, not as they conform to predetermined organizational boundaries. Programs for high-risk families, in particular, cannot follow traditional models. They must be intensive, comprehensive, flexible, and readily accessible. This is not to say that every institution must be all things to all people. But it is to say that people-serving institutions can no longer function exclusively as the deliverers of specified services to specified populations. Rather, they must become members of a broader community, acting in concert with individual and other institutional members of that community. In a condition of limited resources, which is likely to continue, this perspective also will serve to mobilize all possible capacity in support of those in need and to maximize the opportunity afforded by every interaction with disadvantaged children and families.

-- As systems are reconfigured, the emphasis must shift from remediation and maintenance to early intervention and, ultimately, prevention. Early childhood education, family support programs, child nutrition, and quality prenatal, postnatal, and pediatric health care exemplify the type of preventive strategy which is cost-effective and socially responsible. Even when it is too late for primary prevention, there is time to respond to early warning signs of trouble, to deal with

small problems before they become crises or failure. Teachers often say that they can tell by the third grade which children will need special help to avoid long-term difficulties in school; it makes sense to provide

supplementary help then, rather than a more extensive and probably less successful "dropout prevention" or teen parent program seven years later. The family unsure of how to discipline a difficult child should be able to secure guidance before the frustration builds to an abusive situation. Early intervention also means early identification. Often, a system different from that with the primary response capability is in the best position to identify people who might benefit from early intervention. The welfare department can identify high-risk families who should receive special encouragement to enroll their young children in early childhood education programs. Long before there is a visible bruise that would precipitate protective services involvement, teachers who see a child daily can detect signs of home-based stress that might warrant family support services.

These last examples highlight the relevance of collaboration among the education, welfare, and child welfare systems--the focus of **Joining Forces**--to the "big picture" contained in these principles. Obviously, collaboration cannot provide the total answer. These principles, and the expanded view of societal effort and institutional mission that they incorporate, call for wide-ranging action not only by these three systems, but by many players. Moreover, much progress can and will be made through change within individual systems.

Yet, the full power of these principles is achievable only if individual system change is accompanied by new linkages among our established systems, by the development of a comprehensive vision of what must occur to help children and families, and by eventual reconfiguration of the systems and their interrelationships to respond more holistically and effectively to those they serve. Collaboration among the three leading systems affecting children, complementing individual system reform, can move us much closer to these greater objectives and can "set the pace" for a broader partnership in the future.

V. Collaboration: New Perspectives to Serve A New Vision

A. What We Mean by Collaboration: From First Steps to "Deep Structural Change"

There is widespread agreement both that systemic interaction has been too limited in the past, and that the content and quality of the interaction which has taken place is insufficient to the demands of the present, let alone of future. Still, discussions about collaboration rarely deal with possibilities that go beyond relatively minor, peripheral activities for the organizations.

Collaboration, once it is considered below that surface level, is a complex concept. Joining Forces believes that a sufficiently broad and widely accepted definition of "collaboration" must evolve over time, as joint deliberation about better ways to help disadvantaged children and adults probes ever deeper into our systems and ways of doing business. For the moment, we propose a distinction between collaboration as it is frequently understood, in terms of joint ventures undertaken by or formal linkages established between two or more systems, and a more pervasive change in the basic ways systems function.

The most visible and best understood demonstrations of collaboration are formal linkages between and initiatives jointly undertaken by two or more systems. These might entail multiple systems planning and operating a range of related components, a co-sponsored effort, co-located efforts, an effort of one organization to which another lends resources or support, or agreements and processes through which one system accesses another. Joint ventures are an important and valuable aspect of collaboration. They satisfy specific needs, establish a base of shared experience, and often serve a "public relations" function that encourages outside support and gives positive reinforcement to the participants.

But joint ventures are not enough. At best, they deal with concerns of the moment and issues of relatively limited scope, and from the systems' perspective, often retain the flavor of a "special project," with attendant

risks to long-term survival. A broader view of collaboration must reach beyond specific instances in which organizations access or relate to one another. It must address the goals to which organizational effort is directed; the way in which the systems' individual, routine work is structured; and the way in which the systems are positioned to deal with problems not yet known.

Collaboration at this level would not only consist of a specified set of joint programs and activities, but would be an ongoing, dynamic process of reassessment, revitalization, and redesign. It would be carried out by organizations that view themselves as part of a broader set of systems and members of a broader community. The institutions, and the people who comprise them, would take an holistic view of those they serve and the communities in which they reside, sharing "ownership" of problems and successes, whether or not these fall within the specific purview of the organization. Institutional missions would be aligned to address a shared vision of what they are trying to achieve for children, adults, and families.

With collaboration deeply rooted, basic organizational frameworks for decisionmaking and program design would assure that individual system decisions were made with consideration of, and cross-system communication about, shared goals and reciprocal effects of action. Individual systems, while not trying to meet all needs themselves, would reach beyond traditional boundaries of activity to take actions supportive of the overall well-being of those they serve and the effective mobilization of all systems available to help.

The real test of whether or not collaboration is central rather than peripheral to a system will lie in the extent to which it has been incorporated into the operational elements which are the lifeblood of the system. To "tame the bureaucracy" and sustain that achievement, one must reach deep into the fabric of structures, mechanisms, and processes by which the organization lives. Collaboration will be a core aspect of organizational functioning, not a luxury or a set of ad hoc connections between essentially unchanged entities, when :

-- Established, ongoing processes for joint planning create an interagency framework of shared goals, assure systematic identification of current and emerging needs, and facilitate the joint definition of responses to those needs;

-- Systems routinely secure input from one another about planned policies and actions, and address or incorporate suggestions before proceeding;

-- Budgets and funding streams are structured so that people can be served in the most appropriate manner or place without threatening the financial stability of specific organizations, and so that creative ideas that cross organizational boundaries can be implemented or at least tried in a timely way;

-- At the systemic level, policies and operations are routinely monitored from a joint perspective and problems, rather than festering, are readily brought to a visible "bridge" agent, like a coordinating council, for resolution;

-- At the individual or family level, a designated person with responsibility and authority that spans any single system, possibly called a "case manager," assists those seeking help with problem-solving and the use of multiple systems. Acting also as a buffer and counterweight on the side of the client to the massive power that collaborating systems may appear to possess, this person allows those seeking help to retain a sense and measure of control over what is happening;

-- Individuals or families who need help are readily identified and effectively connected to resources by a wide range of staff who have the training, tools and time to carry out this established part of their responsibility. School personnel and service providers have received pre-service and in-service training so that they understand the communities in which they work; are able

to recognize a range of needs, problems and problems-in-the-making; understand the resources available across systems; and can make appropriate connections between those in need and available resources. Referrals are facilitated by simple, well-tested procedures and by easily used resource materials that explain what different systems do, how they work, how they are accessed, and whom to contact. Job descriptions clearly establish these new staff roles, and workloads are adjusted so that staff have the time to explore and help with needs outside their central area of responsibility. Further adjustments are occasionally made to allow continued involvement, even after referral, of a staff member who has established a positive, helping relationship;

-- Collaborative action and effective intervention are further stimulated and supported by policies which, within reasonable limits, allow the exchange of information across systems, and by data systems which create mutually relevent information in a compatible form;

-- Services are located where they are readily accessible to those who need them, even if that is at a site operated by another system (e.g., school-based services); and

-- There is greater stability and job satisfaction among staff, who feel good about the "completeness" of their efforts, their accomplishments, their relationships with those they teach or serve, and the helping nature of the systems in which they work. Feedback about referrals lets them know that their collaborative action has made a difference, and performance evaluation criteria and reward systems provide formal organizational recognition and sanction for their contributions. Creative individuals are encouraged to explore greater avenues for collaboration, and those who are responsible for operations and management are receptive to new ideas. Newsletters, cross-training, conferences, and similar mechanisms reinforce mutual understanding, cross-system communication, and enthusiasm for joint action.

Even with the realization of a broad vision built on the common principles which are emerging, there will still be multiple separate systems with distinct responsibilities. The scale and scope of public action today makes that inevitable. A unitary institution that meets all human needs is simply not feasible.

Despite this, our overall people-serving capacity can be characterized by comprehensiveness, accessibility, flexibility, and similar features which are important to helping disadvantaged children and adults. From a beginning base of specific joint ventures that introduce a positive pattern of interaction, we can bring about change in the overall functioning of organizations, reinforcing this through key operational elements that assure sustained benefits. In this way, we can establish a new way of doing business, a far-reaching collaborative environment with institutions that, through combined effort, are effective in assuring better outcomes for those they serve.

B. Targets For Action

The responsibilities and interests of systems intersect in a number of configurations. As organizations pursue collaboration in a more coherent and comprehensive way, the agenda for action at one time or another is likely to include all of these:

Areas in which there is an established, mandated sharing of responsibility, and generally, formally defined points of intersection. The minimum objective here would be to assure smooth, efficient and effective execution of those responsibilities. Reaching further, organizations would develop and address a view of their mutual responsibility that goes beyond the narrow legal definition. Examples include the handling of child abuse cases (state mandates) and service planning for handicapped children ages zero to six (federal mandates).

Areas in which formally established responsibility is segmented, and usually assigned to one organization, but in which there is mutual

interest, impact, or opportunity. An initial objective here would be assuring that, wherever possible, impacts one system will have on another are anticipated and appropriate plans are developed. More creative and extensive collaboration would lead to the identification of opportunities for complementary action that would be of mutual benefit to the systems and their mutual clients. The promotion of self-sufficiency through welfare reform and dropout prevention are good examples; at a more limited level, there is the handling of children in public care (e.g., foster homes) or returning to the community from institutions, who may pose special challenges to the schools they attend.

Areas for which no one is clearly responsible or in which responsibility is dispersed among organizations whose roles relative to one another are not defined. This may also include areas of strong but not yet legally crystallized public interest, on the order of "somebody ought to do something about . . ." Basic objectives would be to avoid duplication and ensure an effective distribution of responsibility, given the different organizational missions and capacity. Where new responses are indicated, organizations would "collaborate to create" that which is needed or to advocate for action by others. Adolescent parenting, early childhood development, and children in homeless families are examples of issues in this area.

In the ideal world, building a collaborative agenda and environment might be approached through a rational, deliberative, and comprehensive process of analysis and planning -- determining and gaining concurrence on a broad spectrum of supports that people need and should have in order to succeed; assessing current capacity to meet those needs and identifying indicated changes in the current situation; jointly developing plans to make the necessary changes; and implementing those plans, probably simultaneously in many sectors. Given the lack of past communication among systems and the size, complexity, and investment in what exists, however, the process is more likely to be incremental than comprehensive, at least until a base of experience is established.

Where is collaborative activity most likely to start and where is it most likely to meet with early success? Frequently, the key motivator is systemic "pain" -- inefficiency, inability to carry out necessary tasks, undesirable impacts, or bad press. It is easier to garner support to fix tangible problems than to tackle abstract matters because "it's the right thing to do." Fortunately, in terms of seeing a benefit for people, many issues that cause "pain" to organizations are ones which also impact negatively on those who need help from those organizations, so resolution will serve both.

Strong public concern about an issue may encourage or pressure systems to respond, especially if that concern gains focus in the political arena. Collaboration may also be fueled by the opportunity to secure additional revenue to address an issue. And we should not discount totally the desire to do the "right" or rational thing. As management sophistication in state and local government has grown in the past two decades, there has been increasing use of more strategic approaches to shaping future organizational directions.

Whatever the motivation, the type of issue selected for initial focus will influence the likelihood of successful collaboration, as well as the ability to move from an incremental process to comprehensive change. The process needs to start where there is interest, where the reason for people's participation is clear, and where the outcome is likely to be of clear and significant benefit to people, as well as to the systems.

Experience shows that issues in the third area discussed above -- where no one is responsible or responsibility is dispersed -- are the best bets for early success with collaboration. "Turf battles" are less likely here, and there is more opportunity for creativity, which is both enjoyable and often less difficult than trying to change what already exists. Even these issues will reach difficult points, however. The next section outlines some of the elements that can help sustain the process in spite of these stumbling blocks.

C. Making It Work: What Contributes to Successful Collaboration[5]

The factors working against successful collaboration are many and imposing -- restrictive laws and regulations; categorical funding streams; large and complex organizational structures; very different jurisdictional boundaries and lack of comparability between governance levels; differing professional orientations, training and vocabulary; competing pressures and priorities; inertia that makes it easier not to act.

But at least a limited base of experience affirms that these barriers are not insurmountable, and that there are proven techniques which can help achieve success.

Top-level commitment, from key officials like the governor, mayor, or agency head, and from other prestigious members of the community, is vital. This provides inspiration, incentive, and a vision toward which the process is directed. Further, it constitutes permission for the risk-taking that collaboration entails. Also important is day-to-day leadership by skillful, knowledgeable facilitators. Yet, the collaborative process should never become too dependent on the charisma or presence of any single individual. Too many factors -- from the personal to the political -- could remove that person from the scence.

Ongoing collaboration typically needs a supporting structure or organization to foster, design, and implement the collaborative process. Again, though, a caution is in order. The structure, or "collaborative" as it is frequently called, must not be confused with the real objective, a deep-reaching pattern interaction and the creation of processes and attitudes through which new forms of collaboration will continue to evolve.

Involving all the key players, including groups like professional unions, as early as possible, is important, as is an effective team-building

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[5]Sources for this section include Terry Clark, evaluator of the Ford Foundation's Dropout Collaboratives, Bill Milliken of Cities in Schools, Community of Purpose by Esther Rodriguez et. al. (Education Commission of the States), and Interagency Collaboration Experience: What We Have Learned by the Department of Social and Health Services/Region I (Spokane) et. al.

process. A good process gives participants a sense of shared control and decisionmaking, nurtures trust, and encourages mutual understanding. As Joining Forces has seen in its initial months, there is little interaction among the systems and, as a result, little understanding of one another's structure, purposes, activities, and constraints. At the outset, time must be devoted to the exchange of basic information; this foundation has to be reinforced by good communication and good feedback throughout the collaborative process to assure operational effectiveness and ongoing trust.

Early in the process, when participants are still struggling to understand and get past their differences, it is useful to focus on issues whose mutual relevance and importance is readily apparent. An accurate needs assessment can help define such issues, and the process itself can serve as a team-building tool. As discussed in the previous section, collaboration, especially at the beginning, is easier if the selected issues do not directly impinge on anyone's established "turf."

The goals of the collaborative process must also be of clear mutual benefit and relevance, and should include both short- and long-term objectives. It takes time to build trust, to develop plans and secure acceptance of those plans, and to achieve change, especially at a systemic level. Yet, political pressures and the participants' own need for reinforcement often necessitate prompt, tangible results. Interim milestones can help meet these requirements, while at the same time, more extended and more realistic time-frames allow for pursuit of broader change.

Clearly defined responsibilities and assignments, equitably distributed among participants, build shared ownership in the results, establish a priority for collaboration in the midst of competing demands for participants' time, and help assure that the work will get done. This also speaks to the need for a commitment of staff time and dollars to meet a workload likely to increase in the beginning, even if it eventually results in more efficient use of organizational resources.

VI. The Role of Joining Forces

Joining Forces is a national, multi-faceted effort to develop and promote the adoption of joint strategies through which the education, welfare and child welfare systems can aid adults and children at risk. Joining Forces is an implementation-oriented endeavor, seeking to be a catalyst for tangible change in policy and practice.

The enthusiastic response to Joining Forces among top officials reflects a widespread belief that collaboration among systems is essential, as well as a readiness to act on that belief. Given this pro-collaboration spirit, is an initiative like Joining Forces really necessary to create and advance a collaborative agenda? Can we not assume that these officials will move forward on their own?

In fact, it is some of the most committed officials who have offered the strongest endorsement of Joining Forces, indicating that they see it as both a support to their own plans and as a way of engaging other important players. Based on their recommendations and our own observations of collaborative activity to date, we believe that there is a clear need, place and purpose for an effort that encourages collaboration among systems as a complement to the change which is taking place within those systems.

Joining Forces is providing the spark to get discussion and action started. Despite strong sentiment favoring collaboration and frequent discussion of the subject within sectors, Joining Forces' Wingspread Conference appears to have been the first opportunity for broad-based dialogue among the leadership of these sectors. Those officials told us with considerable regret that this void at the national level is often paralleled within their own states, where interaction is very limited. The press of daily demands simply overshadows the potential of opening a dialogue. But most do not need to be convinced of its importance; they responded eagerly when Joining Forces said, "Let's get on with it." For these leaders, Joining Forces was the impetus to give priority to a deeply felt concern and the public validation that this is an appropriate priority. For those less attuned to the need for collaboration, Joining Forces has at

least brought the issue to consciousness and over the longer term can help secure their commitment.

Joining Forces is serving as a visible symbol and focus for the idea of collaboration. A national effort of substantial scope carries with it high visibility and credibility for the idea of collaboration, providing on an ongoing basis the kind of incentive that the Wingspread Conference and other opening actions achieved at the onset. And because collaboration is its sole concern, Joining Forces can assure sustained visibility. Joining Forces will be an identifiable entity through which people can share their accommplishments and get help with problems. We can provide the recognition of achievement that serves to reinforce and stimulate replication of positive action. Finally, Joining Forces can serve as a vehicle for collaboration among the many national associations which otherwise, as Jule Sugarman notes, may take actions which could have the effect of widening differences and adding to difficulties between sectors.

Joining Forces will help frame a far-reaching definition and understanding of "collaboration," and will be an advocate for this concept. While most people heartily endorse "collaboration" in the abstract, interpretations vary widely and, as we have said, few reach deep into the core of how systems are structured and how they function. The consideration of collaborative possibilities is limited by the way issues are defined, and by the experience of the individuals participating. Often, an instance in which collaboration would be appropriate is simply not recognized as such. With a broad perspective that derives from our existence outside any one system, and a focused commitment to the concept of collaboration, Joining Forces will be alert to opportunities for joint effort. Further, as we observe, participate in, and analyze collaborative endeavors across the country, we will help to elicit and publicize the lessons of these endeavors so that those within the systems can see future opportunities themselves. Stopping too soon or settling for too little, many collaborative efforts never realize their full potential. To avoid this pitfall, we will help structure solutions that institutionalize change, identify the underlying principles demonstrated by incremental achievement, and encourage movement to the next level of collaboration.

Joining Forces will help overcome the barriers to collaboration, develop new approaches, and address issues of implementation, so that far-reaching collaboration actually happens. There is a risk that the first blush of enthusiasm will quickly wane in the face of the difficulties and frustrations of actually tackling a collaborative agenda. This will neither surprise nor dishearten us. Joining Forces is rooted in the realities of large systems operations, and understands that, while change in these systems is possible, it is also complex to achieve.

Bringing experience, skill, and a unique combination of knowledge to direct work with states and local communities, Joining Forces will help maintain commitment and guide the efforts through the rough waters. We will help assure that a viable process is established, that productive issues are selected, and that potential "breakdown" points are handled. Our independent staff, familiar with each system and aided by their status as outsiders with some measure of prestige, will provide trustworthy "translation" to foster the mutual understanding necessary to successful collaboration. We will serve as a bridge between the sectors. Adding to our own expertise about the policies and operations of the various systems, we will have the capacity to broker a wide range of technical and other resources that will be needed.

We will also serve as a link between states and communities which might otherwise grapple simultaneously but separately with a common concern, where combining their efforts and insights may solve the problem more expeditiously and yield a stronger result.

Finally, we will help to clarify and address the complex issues that will arise as the process of collaboration unfolds. For example, who should collaborate with whom, when the "balance of power" lies at different levels in different systems? In an era that stresses accountability, how do we accomodate sharing of responsibility among systems and between systems and those they serve, which may blur the direct relationship between contribution and outcome? How do we define "risk" so that it has relevance to different sectors with different concerns? Recognizing that the process

of collaboration must begin before new programs are in place -- indeed, that it may provide the impetus for creation of new programs -- how do we sustain commitment during an often frustrating period of transition?

The steps that Joining Forces proposes to take to fulfill these purposes acknowledge that one cannot change BIG systems by "nibbling at their ankles." Rather, it will take direct, simultaneous action on multiple fronts and at multiple levels to command attention, create momentum, secure commitment, and achieve results. Toward these ends, Joining Forces will:

-- Provide forums for dialogue among education and human service officials to increase understanding between sectors, begin planning of joint action, and build a base of institutional leadership for collaborative efforts;

-- Collect, prepare, and disseminate information on successful examples of collaboration and related issues so that useful experience gained in one place is available to help and encourage others to take action;

-- Directly assist states and localities in the development, implementation, and evaluation of collaborative approaches; and

-- Foster supportive action at the national level both by the federal government and by national associations representing the various constituencies with whom Joining Forces will work.

These mutually reinforcing components are described more fully in a related document called Joining Forces: Findings and Future Directions.

VII. Conclusion

Some may ask why in this paper we talk so much about "systems," if our primary concern is people.

Admittedly, it would be difficult, and more important inappropriate, to stir broad public interest in making changes that simply increase bureaucratic comfort. Moreover, it is often true that what is seen as good for "the system" may not be good for the people it is designed to serve. In fact, what is judged to be in the best interests of a system and those who run it is sometimes antithetical to the needs of those the system serves.

Consequently, there are some who see an estrangement between the concept of systemic change and the commitment to improved outcomes for people. Joining Forces, while recognizing the inherent risks in focusing on systems, does not agree. If we clearly define the ultimate goals of change in terms of benefits for people, and we are careful to monitor the impacts of change, then systemic change can be an effective medium for bringing about improved outcomes people. Indeed, if our goal is to improve outcomes for large numbers of people, change at the systemic level may be the only means of mobilizing the resources necessary to the task.

Unfortunately, as Lisbeth Schorr and others point out, much less is known about how successfully to reconfigure massive systems than we do about the kind of small-scale social interventions which are effective. It is precisely this knowledge gap to which Joining Forces responds. We seek to to aid large-scale people-serving systems in fundamentally changing the way they do business, so that the knowledge that is available is used to help not just a few children in a pilot project or even a few hundred in one community, but the millions of children now at risk of long-term disadvantage.

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